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## Nicaragua Again Offers to Talk Peace With U.S., but Washington Is Skeptical

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MANAGUA, Nicaragua — President Daniel Ortega said he is ready to negotiate and sign with the U.S. a mutual security treaty that would convert Central America into "a neutral zone" free of East-West competition.

In a one-hour interview Wednesday night, only hours after the U.S. House of Representatives shelved President Reagan's \$100 million aid package for Contra guerrillas trying to destabilize Mr. Ortega's Sandinista government, the Nicaraguan president said he is ready to compromise on certain issues that concern the U.S., including alleged Sandinista aid to Central American leftist guerrilla groups.



Daniel Ortega

He suggested, however, that his government intends to expand its armed forces and seek more foreign military support if Congress eventually passes the administration's program.

"If the U.S. is fearful that Nicaragua will transform itself into a military base of an outside power," he said, "Nicaragua is ready to compromise, to sign treaties to assure the security of Nicaragua and the security of the U.S."

In the past, the U.S. has pushed for specific verification procedures to back up such promises by Mr. Ortega, who previously has offered to negotiate a security treaty. American officials also say the U.S. reserves the right to hold military maneuvers in the area with the consent of host countries, that it wants a regional agreement rather than a bilateral one and that it demands democratic reforms within Nicaragua.

### U.S. Response

Responding to Mr. Ortega, a Reagan administration official said Nicaragua was attempting to compensate for the uncompromising stance it took two weeks ago at a Contadora-group peace conference in Panama City, where Nicaraguan representatives refused to agree to a peace treaty commitment, saying they couldn't comply until the U.S. stops its "aggression."

The Reagan official said Mr. Ortega's proposals were "something like what was available" during nine U.S.-Nicaragua negotiating sessions held in Mexico in Janu-

ary last year. "Ortega wants to get back to the line of scrimmage," he said.

The official added that the proposals "will be rendered unserious" because they were made to the press instead of through diplomatic channels.

Speaking in the offices of the ruling Sandinista directorate, Mr. Ortega said that, in proposing a bilateral peace treaty with the U.S., Nicaragua was ready to agree to withdrawal of all foreign military advisers and refuse to aid "irregular forces" in the region. In exchange, he said, the U.S. would have to halt its military pressure on Nicaragua and end military maneuvers in the region. U.S. officials have said in the past that the prospect of direct negotiations between Nicaragua and the U.S. makes U.S. allies in the region nervous.

On military matters, Mr. Ortega said he intends to retain a 10-to-1 manpower advantage over the Contra forces. If Congress approves the administration's aid program and increases the size of Contra forces to 35,000 men, the Sandinistas will need 350,000 men under arms, he said; its army, militia and reserves currently number about 200,000.

### U.S. Advisers With Contras?

Mr. Ortega claimed that a handful of U.S. advisers without the authorization of Congress have been stationed in Contra camps in Honduras since Easter week, when the Sandinista army crossed the Honduran border to attack the camps. Speaking of the alleged advisers, he warned, "They run the risk of death. It's a war zone."

(A Western source with access to intelligence information said Mr. Ortega's charge "isn't totally wrong." The source spoke of "one or two" Central Intelligence Agency liaison people who regularly visit the camps, but he contended they aren't advisers.)

Mr. Ortega claimed the Contras have been neutralized. "I'm optimistic," he said. But he added: "There is a dangerous tendency. When the Contras are defeated, the danger increases of a direct involvement of the U.S., including an invasion. It's a process of Vietnamization."